AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

The following listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application.

LISTING OF CLAIMS

1. (cancelled)
2. (cancelled)
3. (cancelled)
4. (cancelled)
5. (cancelled)
6. (cancelled)
7. (cancelled)
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9. (cancelled)
10. (cancelled)
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12. (cancelled)
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14. (cancelled)
15. (cancelled)
16. (cancelled)

19. (cancelled)

20. (cancelled)

21. (cancelled)

22. (cancelled)

23. (cancelled)

24. (cancelled)

25. (cancelled)

26. (cancelled)

27. (cancelled)

28. (cancelled)

29. (cancelled)

30. (cancelled)

31. (cancelled)

32. (currently amended) A computer-readable medium having computer-readable instructions according to claim ~~31~~ 67, such that when executing said instructions a computer will assist in the generation of a date, an incremental count or a barcode.

33. (cancelled)

34. (currently amended) A method according to claim ~~33~~ 68, wherein said generic non-coder specific format is consistent with standards of the extensible mark-up language (XML) recommendations.

35. (currently amended) A method according to claim ~~33~~ 68, wherein said generic non-coder specific format defines a plurality of fields, wherein each of said fields specifies generic instructions for a specific portion of the code.

36. (currently amended) A method according to claim ~~35~~ 68, wherein a field represents information concerning dates.

37. (currently amended) A method according to claim ~~35~~ 68, wherein a field represents information concerning barcodes.

38. (currently amended) A method according to claim ~~35~~ 68, wherein a field represents information concerning an incremental counter.

39. (currently amended) A computer-readable memory system having computer-readable data stored therein, said data comprising:

a generic image ~~code~~ description for ~~a code~~ an image to be applied to packaged consumer products;

[illegible] capabilities of a coder; and

program instructions to produce coder specific ~~code~~ instructions to be sent to coder with reference to said generic image description and with reference to said processing capabilities of said coder ~~capabilities~~.

40. (currently amended) A computer-readable memory system according to claim 39, wherein said program instructions are configured to assist with ~~the~~ generation of a date, a barcode, or an incrementing counter.

41. (new) Apparatus for applying graphical information onto packaged consumer products, in which said products are packed individually and then further packed into groups of products, said apparatus comprising:

a plurality of coders which apply graphical information to product packaging in response to received instructions,

a processing system which generates said instructions in response to received input data representing said graphical information;

wherein a first of said coders is capable of performing a specific function and a second of said coders is incapable of performing said function, and

on receipt of input data requiring said function to be performed, said processing system refers to capabilities of said coders to perform said function, and in dependence of said capabilities said processing system:

(a) instructs said first coder to generate said graphical information such that

(b) performs said required function before supplying lower level instructions to said second coder.

42. (new) Apparatus as claimed in claim 41, wherein said specific function comprises calculating a data from said input data.

43. (new) Apparatus as claimed in claim 42, wherein said date is a sell by date or a use by date.

44. (new) Apparatus as claimed in claim 41, wherein said specific function comprises generating a character string from data representing a date.

45. (new) Apparatus as claimed in claim 41, wherein said specific function comprises calculating a date from said input data and generating a bitmap representing said date.

46. (new) Apparatus as claimed in claim 41, wherein said specific function comprises incrementing a number to be coded onto said packaging.

47. (new) Apparatus as claimed in claim 41, wherein said specific function comprises incrementing a number to be coded onto said packaging and generating a

48. (new) Apparatus as claimed in claim 41, wherein said specific function comprises generating a character string from input data representing a barcode.

49. (new) Apparatus as claimed in claim 41, wherein said specific function comprises generating a bitmap representing a barcode from said input data.

50. (new) Apparatus as claimed in claim 41, wherein said input data comprises an instruction to code text using a font, and said specific function comprises generating a bitmap representation of said text.

51. (new) Apparatus as claimed in claim 41, wherein said input data comprises an instruction to code text using a font, said processing system is configured to examine the orientation of said font, and said specific function comprises generating a bitmap representation of said text at said specified orientation.

52. (new) Apparatus as claimed in claim 41, wherein said input data comprises generic coding data and said processing system converts said generic coding data into coder specific data.

53. (new) Apparatus as claimed in claim 41, wherein said specific function comprises at least one of functions (a) to (e) wherein function:

(b) comprises generating graphic data representing a barcode from a character string;

(c) comprises calculating a character string representing a barcode;

(d) comprises calculating a date; and

(e) comprises generating a character string representing a date.

54. (new) Apparatus as claimed in claim 41, wherein one of said coders applies said information to printed packaging of a consumer product.

55. (new) Apparatus as claimed in claim 41, wherein said consumer product is a perishable food item.

56. (new) Apparatus as claimed in claim 41, wherein said consumer products are prepared meals.

57. (new) Apparatus as claimed in claim 41, wherein one of said coders applies said information to a package of a consumer product and another one of said coders applies said information to an assembly of product packages.

58. (new) Apparatus as claimed in claim 57, wherein a third coder applies a code to a packaged unit having a plurality of said assemblies packed therein.

59. (new) A method of applying graphical information onto packaged consumer products, in which said products are packed individually and then further packed into groups of products, and a plurality of coders apply graphical information to product packaging in response to instructions received from a processing system wherein a first of said coders is capable of performing a specific function and a second of said coders is incapable of performing said function, said method comprising the steps of:

receiving input data representing graphical information to be coded onto product packaging;

generating said instructions in response to said input data and with reference to capabilities of said coders to perform said specific function,

such that on receipt of input data requiring said specific function to be performed, said processing system:

(a) instructs said first coder to generate said graphical information such that said first coder performs said specific function; and

(b) performs said specific function before supplying lower level instructions to said second coder.

60. (new) A method according to claim 59, wherein said specific function comprises calculating a data from said input data and generating a character string representing said date.

61. (new) A method according to claim 59, wherein said specific function comprises calculating a data form said input data and generating a bitmap representing said date.

62. (new) A method according to claim 59, wherein said specific function comprises incrementing a number to be coded onto said packaging.

63. (new) A method according to claim 59, wherein said specific function comprises incrementing a number to be coded onto said packaging and generating a bitmap representation of said number.

64. (new) A method according to claim 59, wherein said specific function comprises generating a character string from input data representing a barcode.

65. (new) A method according to claim 59, wherein said specific function comprises generating a bitmap representing a barcode from said input data.

66. (new) A method according to claim 59, wherein said specific function comprises at least one of functions (a) to (e) wherein function:

(a) comprises incrementing a numerical counter;

(b) comprises generating graphic data representing a barcode from a

(d) comprises calculating a date; and

(e) comprises generating a character string representing a date.

67. (new) A computer-readable medium having computer-readable instructions executable by a computer such that, when executing said instructions, a computer will perform the steps of:

receiving input data representing graphical information to be coded onto product packaging;

generating instructions in response to said input data and in dependence of capabilities of coders to perform a function,

such that on receipt of input data requiring said function to be performed, said computer will:

(a) instruct a first coder which is capable of performing said specific function to generate said graphical information such that said first coder performs said specific function; and

(b) perform said specific function before supplying lower level instructions to a second coder which is incapable of performing said specific function.

68. (new) A method of communicating between a first processing device configured to facilitate design of an image to be applied to packaged products and a second processing device configured to control a coder coding packaged products.

a generic image data file transmitted from the first processing device to the second processing device defines an image in a generic non-coder-specific format defining a requirement for said image; and

the second processing device is aware of processing capabilities of the coder and instructs said coder to apply images such that instructions sent to said coder depend upon said generic image data file and a definition of said processing capabilities.

69. (new) A method according to claim 68, wherein said generic image data file requires a specific function to be performed and on receipt of said generic image data file, said second processing system refers to processing capabilities of said coder to perform said function, and

(a) when said coder is able to perform said function, said second processing system instructs said coder to generate said images such that said coder performs said function; and

(b) when said coder is incapable of performing said function, said second processing system performs said function before supplying lower level instructions to said coder.